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ABSTRACT

The Education Corps was established in Atlanta, Georgia, to encourage increased community involvement in the public schools. Contacts with community churches were established, and the program was implemented mainly through the cooperation of these churches. Seminarians worked actively in the schools with children, engaging in enrichment activities, tutoring and supervising games, recreation, and physical education. In evaluating the program it was felt that this involvement was of great value. Particular emphasis was made on the fact that in the role of adult models, the seminarians were of great help, particularly in the realm of counseling and discussing problems with the children. (JD)

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RESEARCH AND EVALUATION REPORT

VOL. X NO. 2 AUGUST, 1976

EVALUATION OF EDUCATION CORPS

1975-76

Atlanta Public Schools

Atlanta, Georgia

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EVALUATION OF THE EDUCATION CORPS

1975-76

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RATIONALE

For the past three years, the administration of the the Atlanta Public Schools has encouraged increased public participation in its schools. Support has been sought from every level of public and private agencies. Considerable discussion with the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce has resulted in a number of cooperative efforts to improve educational services to Atlanta children. The Chamber's recognition of the need for public support of Atlanta Schools prompted the president to urge the Christian Council to spearhead the creation of an "Education Corps." Modeled after the Peace Corps, the Education Corps was envisioned "to extend and add depth to the present educational structure."

The challenge was answered by Reverend Dick Fuller, Assistant Pastor of the Tenth Street Methodist Church and a member of the staff of Urban Action. Subsequent to additional discussion among representatives of Atlanta Public Schools, the Chamber of Commerce, the Christian Council, Candler School of Theology, and Reverend Fuller, an agreement was reached whereby each agency would contribute to the implementation of a program of support services for identified schools of the Atlanta System. Direct costs of office space and associated amenities were to be borne by the Chamber; Urban Action and the Candler School of Theology would provide the director's salary; and the Atlanta Public Schools would provide volunteer training, technical assistance, and instruction. By combining these financial and personnel resources, a community based organization would coordinate community volunteers through existing community institutions in support of the Atlanta Public Schools. Ideally, such a program would eventually establish a level of community involvement that would promote a knowledge and understanding of the city schools; myths and fears would be dispelled; and Atlanta would experience a return of all income and racial groups to the School System and to the city.

Therefore, given the desire for increased community participation in/and support of the public school system, and given the ever present need for new resources to serve the educational program, the Education Corps was established for the purpose of providing an additional source of volunteer assistance rooted in the existing institutions of each local school community.

PROGRAM

In relation to the established purpose, two subgroups of the church-affiliated community were identified: seminary students and church members. The unique qualifications and many-faceted talents of the members of these groups were determined to be appropriate to fulfill the following needs of the School System:

A. The pupil's need for adult models and adult associations that are nonthreatening, supportive of interpersonal needs, and available for personal communication;

B. The need, at the individual school level, to recruit and coordinate volunteer efforts of local community members in support of the staff and existing program; and

C. The need for assistance in clerical, instructional, recreational, and enrichment activities within the existing program.

Goals

Utilizing these resources, the Education Corps pursued the following goals:

A. To provide two seminarians for each school to work with students on a one-to-one basis or in small groups and to offer them the kind of interpersonal support they might need; and

B. To provide a seminarian to a church in the community as a volunteer to coordinate the development of resources at the church which would respond to the volunteer needs of the local school.

Objectives

Specific objectives were established in relation to only one goal of the program. The activities of the seminarians which were aimed towards interpersonal support for students anticipated the following changes:

A. Students, after having conferred with Education Corps volunteers, would demonstrate a lower incidence of disruptive behavior in the classroom setting.

B. Students, after having participated in Education Corps activities, would demonstrate an increase in school attendance.

C. Students participating in the Education Corps activities would develop a more positive self-concept.

D. Students participating in Education Corps activities would demonstrate a greater interest in their course work, individual projects, homework assignments, and class discussions.

While specific objectives were not defined in relation to coordination of volunteer services from community churches, discussion with the program director indicated that the intention of the program was to identify at least one church in each school community through which volunteers would be recruited.

IMPLEMENTATION

School Selection and Organization

Five schools were selected to participate in the project, at least one from each administrative area: Blair Village, Craddock, Finch, Gordon, and

Home Park. The schools were selected by the project staff and central school personnel. On January 6, 1976, ten seminarians began their assignments, two in each school.

During the planning and initiating of the program, the project director also was trying to establish contacts with churches within the local school community. His efforts were aimed toward finding at least one church for each school that would be the source of volunteers for support services to the school. Churches located within the school community were not responsive to the director's request. Only one school received the services of a group of church volunteers; however, the church was not located in the school community. Blair Village Elementary School had the regular services of volunteers of the Peachtree City Methodist Church.

Criteria for Selecting Children to Participate

Both the activities and the participants in each school were approved by the principal. When the Corps workers acted as counselors, participants were referred by the teacher and/or the principal. In most schools, students themselves requested to talk with the seminarians after they became familiar with them. Other activities such as recreation, supervision, and teacher assistance were determined and supervised by the principal and the teacher. At Blair Village where the seminarians were assigned to classrooms on a regular schedule, all teachers were given the opportunity to have some time scheduled for their rooms.

The stated intention of the proposal was to solicit parent permission before children participated. For many of the services, permission was not required — recreational activities, tutoring, teacher assistance. The need for permission was associated only with the "counseling" activity. However, in many instances, permission was not requested. Only at Finch did all teachers and the principal verify that parent permission was secured before children participated. In most other cases, principals informed all parents that the program was being implemented but did not seek individual permission for children who actually participated.

While the proposal did not exclude any age level from participation, principals of three schools noted that most of the participants who were involved in one-to-one and small group relationships with the seminarians were in fourth grade or above.

Number Served

No records were kept on the children who were served. This was appropriate in that the service was not professional and the nature of the discussions between children and seminarians was very personal and private.

In an informal survey, teachers were asked to estimate the number of children who were in contact with the seminarians and the process by which they came into contact. The teachers' responses are in Table 1. Approximately 36 per cent of the total enrollment of the schools were served. The number of pupils served by two seminarians for six hours a week was about the same in three of the four schools. In the fourth school, Finch, less than half that number were served. While the figures are estimates, they were gathered in the same manner in all schools, and all teachers

responded. Therefore, the discrepancy between the number served at Finch and the number served at the other three schools is significant. The difference may be the result of a number of factors. The Finch Corps workers may have spent more time per child with individual students; they may have worked more with individuals and less with groups. The surveys and principals' comments indicate that this may have been true. They also suggest that more time was spent in recreation at the other schools, an activity that would have enabled the seminary students to interact with more children.

TABLE I

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS BY SCHOOL BY PROCESS OF CONTACT

School	Active Roll	Number of Children Referred by Teacher	Number of Children Requesting a Meeting	Number of Children Actually in Contact
Blair Village	317	--	--	237
Craddock	360	40	74	138
Finch	207	16	55	71
Gordon	553	58	61	135
Home Park	219	89	167	133
Total *	1,339	203	357	477

*The total excludes Blair Village where the seminarians served in classrooms on a scheduled basis, performing clerical, instructional, recreational, and supportive tasks as requested by the teacher.

At Blair Village, nine of twelve teachers received the services of the Education Corps seminarians. This represented about 237 children. However, the contact with children was not so characterized by a one-to-one relationship.

Activities

The Education Corps operated differently in each school, according to the needs that were determined by the principal. Surveys of teachers and the seminarians, and discussions with principals highlighted the general routine of each school as follows:

Blair Village

Both seminary students were in the school every Monday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. During the day they operated on a regular schedule, reporting to different teachers for periods of 30 minutes to two hours. Their activities in the classroom were determined by each teacher. The surveys indicated that most of the time was spent on interpersonal communication and recreational activities, but the seminarians also assisted with tutoring and supervising students. Fifteen minutes at the beginning and end of each day were scheduled for communication with the principal.

Most of the volunteers of Peachtree City Methodist Church assisted in the school every Wednesday. Others came on days more convenient to their own schedules. Many of the 14 volunteers gave more than two hours. Ten of twelve teachers, as well as the principal, were assisted, nine on a regularly scheduled basis. Their assistance included the following activities in order of frequency:

1. Clerical help
2. Enrichment activities
3. Tutoring
4. Listening to children read
5. Reading to children
6. Games, recreation, and physical education
7. Supervising children

Craddock

The seminarians each spent six hours per week at the school. On Tuesdays, one reported from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and one reported from 12:00 noon to 3:00 p.m. Both spent from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon on Thursdays at the school. Most of the time on Tuesdays was spent talking with students on a one-to-one basis and in small groups. Some time was used to assist teachers and to tutor or supervise children. The schedule for Thursday was centered around a basketball program for fifth and sixth graders.

Finch

Two seminarians spent every Monday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Finch. The entire day was spent in counseling and listening to children on a one-to-one basis. Children were recommended by the teachers and actually placed on a schedule for a "rap" session. Occasionally, the seminary students would supervise or participate in recreational activities.

Gordon

Two seminarians each spent six hours a week, divided between two days, at Gordon. Their schedule began with contacts with students whom they had seen on previous days, followed by sessions with new children referred by the teachers and principal, or children who requested to see them. The seminarians also spent time in recreational activities, tutoring, and assisting teachers.

Home Park

The two seminary students assigned to Home Park spent three hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the school. Coming in at 11:00 a.m., they would spend time with the children in the cafeteria and on the playground before meeting with them on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. The seminarians scheduled blocks of time for each teacher when pupils of that teacher were permitted to see them.

In four of the schools, all but Blair Village, the dominant role of the seminarian was that of a counselor or listener. Both the program staff and the school staff acknowledged that the seminary students were not

professional counselors, but all recognized the value of having an adult with whom children could talk confidentially. Two-thirds of the teachers responding to the survey indicated that most of the children probably would not have interacted with another adult in a similar way had the Education Corps not been there.

In these four schools, also, teachers had the opportunity to refer children to the seminarians for personal talks and support. When asked to rank the reasons for their referrals in order of most frequent reason for referral, the results in every school were almost exactly the same. Across schools, the reasons for referral were ranked as follows:

1. Emotional problems
2. Peer relations
3. Family problems
4. Academic problems

This consistency and the ranking itself may be reflective of the fact that the seminarians worked more with older children, in grades four through seven, where peer relations take on greater importance.

Training and Resources

The proposal for the Education Corps suggested that volunteers would be trained in child development and counseling skills and would adhere to the policy of volunteerism of the Atlanta Public Schools. Furthermore, advantage would be taken of the services of the Agnes Scott College Psychology Department for child development training, the Bridge Family Mediation Center for counseling and support skills, and the Atlanta Public Schools Community Affairs Division for tutoring skills and volunteer training.

The seminarians met with the director once a week for discussion of their activities. During a number of these sessions, Dr. Gwen Bate from Agnes Scott College participated, offering advice and information on child psychology and child development. Her participation was deemed essential by the director for the advice and understanding she could offer the Corps workers regarding how to deal with children and their problems. Each seminary student was required to write a case study on one child. Ms. Betsy Guyton, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, was available to provide training and information. Her assistance was requested and received one time during the five months of operation.

Volunteers from the Peachtree City Methodist Church participated in two two-hour training sessions and an orientation day at the school prior to their involvement in Blair Village Elementary School. The first session was conducted by Reverend Fuller and concentrated on the methods of dealing with children and the volunteers' expectations. At the second session, Ms. Guyton and Principal Hugh Moss familiarized the group with the regulations and operation of the School System and the nature of some of the problems they would encounter.

Adherence to Proposal

Although the director attempted to implement the program as stated in the proposal, some conflicts and diversions arose.

Of the two major components of the Education Corps, the seminarians and the church volunteers, the seminarians' involvement was the most fully implemented. The two seminarians assigned to each school in January remained with the program the entire year. One principal emphasized the importance of this continuity and described it as a major factor in the program's success in his school.

The role of the seminarians varied from school to school. The proposal described the position as offering interpersonal support to students in a one-to-one or small group relationship. While this role was fulfilled, either formally or informally in every school, the Corps workers also spent considerable time in other capacities. In some cases these other activities, such as recreation and supervision, allowed the seminarians to create familiarity and friendship with the children and, thus, served to promote their role as "listener" or "counselor." Also, these and other activities were at the direction of the principal who had assessed the school's needs as requiring the accomplished activities.

In accordance with the proposal, and in line with the System guidelines which place volunteers under the supervision of the principal, any redirection of the role of the seminarians by the principal was entirely in order and to the benefit of the children. From the School System's vantage point, the volunteers provided useful assistance. However, there was some indication that the seminarians, as students, may have required more defined experiences relating to interaction with children with problems. If this is true, such experiences might be assured by defining the program as an internship with specific objectives for the interns, rather than as a volunteer program subject to the current needs of the local school. The role of the seminary students, as they actually operated this year, required more that the volunteers be loving, understanding, and willing to help than highly trained in child development and counseling.

Another more obvious diversion from the proposal was the requirement of parent permission for student participation. The instances where this was not done did not cause any problems. Indeed, the nature of much of the participation did not merit parent consent. However, in the more formal counseling activities, parent awareness, if not permission, seems appropriate and necessary. The private nature of the children's discussions, the potential for discussion of family situations, and the action children may take as an outgrowth suggest the need for parent awareness of their children's participation.

The second component of the Education Corps, the link-up between the school and a community church through which volunteers from the church membership and the community would be organized, met with less success. Only one of the five schools had the advantage of church volunteers. The

Peachtree City Methodist Church volunteers at Blair Village Elementary School were highly regarded by the principal and teachers of that school; however, since the church and its members were not a part of the Blair Village School community, the aim to unify the community and promote understanding between the School System and community residents could hardly be achieved.

In soliciting the local churches to participate in the Education Corps, Reverend Fuller encountered little positive response. He suggested that many small churches within the school communities were oppressed with problems that discouraged their involvement, while larger churches were less inclined to participate until they became more familiar with the organization of the program. However, Reverend Fuller also agreed that many churches today draw their congregations from outside the local area of the church building itself. This factor not only could keep the program concept from materializing but also makes the concept itself questionable, i.e., local community support for the local school cannot be gained through the church if the membership is not part of that community. Nevertheless, support from the larger Atlanta community for the entire school system may be a product of general involvement of Atlanta churches as volunteers in any Atlanta schools.

Achievement of Stated Objectives

Evaluation of the specified objectives of the program was not made. All the objectives were defined in terms of improvement in pupil behaviors. Considering that the program did not begin until January and that the seminarians were in the school only six hours a week, the project staff may have been ambitious in suggesting that noticeable change in pupils' behavior would occur. Also, the system-wide objectives for the Atlanta Public Schools required all schools to specify activities that would affect many of the same behaviors. These objectives were written three months before the Corps was implemented. Separation of the effects of the different activities would not have been feasible.

Staff Response

Although there was no documentation of the effects of the program on individual students, there is evidence of the general success of the program, at least in the opinion of the school staffs. Of the 54 teachers in the five schools, 53 agreed that the program should be continued. Thirty-seven felt that continuation was desirable even if there was some expense to be incurred.

The regular school program experienced no significant disruption as a result of the program. Forty-one per cent of the teachers indicated that the schedule of the seminarians was "always convenient" to their own, and 43 per cent that it was "usually convenient."

Since the survey of teachers showed that 203 children were referred to the seminarians by the teachers themselves, it can be concluded that teachers see a need for the kind of "interpersonal support" that the seminarians offered the children. In the report on Finch School's objectives, the principal was quoted as saying that the seminarians helped in allaying

behavior problems in some children that teachers had anticipated as potential disruptors. All five principals spoke highly of the program, its volunteers and director, and indicated a desire to have the Corps back again next year. In the one school that enjoyed services of the church volunteers in addition to the seminarians, the teachers and the principal indicated a desire to have them back next year and, hopefully, to expand the program. Two of the three teachers who did not receive assistance this year said that they would like to receive the volunteers' services next year. The entire staff at Blair Village responded very positively to the volunteers' abilities to adapt to the children and to the school setting. None felt that affiliation with a different church group would be desirable.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the written surveys of the teachers and the seminarians, and based on interviews and discussions with the school principals and with the project director, the following conclusions were drawn:

A. Teachers and principals feel a need for the pupil and teacher support services offered by the seminarians and church volunteers of the Education Corps.

B. The services that were received by the five schools were appropriate and beneficial to pupils and teachers.

C. The direction and supervision by the principal provided assurance that the needs of the local school received priority.

D. While the participants' privacy and welfare may not have been violated, parent permission for participation was not solicited formally in all instances.

E. As the program operated this year, the character and training of all volunteers was sufficient for the tasks.

F. In the one situation where a group of church members provided volunteer services to a school, there was no opportunity to improve school-community relations because the church was in a different community.

G. The concept of increased community cohesiveness through community church involvement in the community school may be based on false assumptions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The services of the Education Corps, both the seminarians and the church volunteers, were so overwhelmingly approved and appreciated by the principals and faculties of the five participating schools that their services

should be recruited again next year. The following recommendations are made with regard to continuation of the program.

A. The director of the program should examine the experiential needs of the seminarians to determine if that component of the Corps requires an intern program rather than a volunteer program.

B. If the operation of the program could be more uniformly directed toward providing counseling kinds of activities, the System should consider using the program as a means to evaluate the need for assigning certified counselors to elementary schools.

C. Should the operation of the program continue to be flexible in the kinds of activities performed by the seminarians, an evaluation component is unnecessary to support the program. However, the information normally required for volunteer programs by the Community Affairs Division should be gathered in accordance with forms suggested in the Volunteer Services Manual.

D. The needs of the school should be assessed prior to the assignment of seminarians or volunteers so as to take maximum advantage of the talents or interests of the Corps members.

E. The need for parent permission should be clarified and, if determined to be necessary, should be processed uniformly in all schools.

F. The assumption that the involvement of a local church in the community school generates increased understanding and community cohesiveness should be systematically examined by the project director. The outcome of the evaluation should direct the project to focus on either a link between local school and church in the same neighborhood or general support of Atlanta schools by volunteers from Atlanta religious institutions.